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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 001937

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS AND DS/IP/SA
NSC FOR DORMANDY

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PINS](#) [CE](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: GSL RESPONSE TO LTTE HEROES' DAY SPEECH
CRITICAL, COMMITMENT TO CEASEFIRE REASSURING

REF: A. COLOMBO 1924

[1](#)B. COLOMBO 1913

Classified By: James F. Entwistle, Deputy Chief of Mission.
Reason 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. The Government of Sri Lanka (GSL)'s response to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)'s annual "Heroes' Day" speech criticized the Tigers' call for an unconditional return to the peace talks as not conducive to "good faith negotiations," and reiterated the GSL's readiness to discuss an interim authority, in tandem with a permanent settlement, in accordance with the December 2002 pro-federalist "Oslo Declaration." The GSL also reasserted its commitment to the Cease-Fire Agreement (CFA), which was seconded by the Sri Lanka Army's assertion to DAO that it will not respond to LTTE provocation. Norwegian Ambassador Brattskar traveled to Kilinochchi December 2 for a meeting with the LTTE. The GSL's renewed public commitment to the CFA is reassuring, especially in light of the JVP's recent statements (however unlikely) about returning to armed insurgency if the GSL cedes to Tiger demands for an interim administration. The Tigers are likely to use the conflicting signals from the GSL and the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), President Kumaratunga's main coalition partner, to reinforce their familiar argument that the south does not have the consensus or will to come back to talks. End Summary.

Government Responds to LTTE Heroes' Day Speech

[1](#)2. (U) On December 1, the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) issued a statement from its Information Department responding to Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) Leader Velupillai Prabhakaran's November 27 "Heroes' Day" speech, in which the Tiger leader demanded that the GSL return to talks based on LTTE proposals for an Interim Self-Governing Authority (ISGA). In its first response to Prabhakaran's speech, the GSL characterized the LTTE's "threatening language" as "scarcely conducive to good faith negotiations." The statement also conveyed the GSL's readiness to discuss an interim authority in tandem with discussions about a permanent settlement, in accordance with the agreement the LTTE and the GSL made in early peace talks in Oslo in December 2002. (Note: Known as the "Oslo Declaration," this agreement proposes federalism as a potential solution to the conflict. End note.) The GSL's statement also reiterated its firm commitment to the "strict maintenance of the Cease-Fire Agreement (CFA)," and condemned "all violations and actions jeopardizing the prevailing ceasefire," which, the GSL asserted, are "leading to the undue rupture of the sensitive balance of ethnic groups presently maintained by the Government..."

[1](#)3. (C) Finally, the statement advised that the GSL is communicating with the Government of Norway (GON), which is facilitating the peace negotiations, about "future steps to be taken in the peace process." Norwegian Ambassador Hans Brattskar told DCM December 1 that he would be going to LTTE administrative center Kilinochchi December 2 on a "low-key" visit to see LTTE Political Wing Leader S.P.Tamilchelvan. Brattskar will brief donor co-chairs on his trip December 3.

[1](#)4. (C) Jehan Perera, Director of the National Peace Council and longtime mission contact, told poloff that he viewed the GSL response to Prabhakaran's speech as positive because it communicated the GSL's willingness to return to negotiations. However, Perera criticized the GSL for offering discordant responses to Prabhakaran's speech, i.e. statements made by GSL coalition partner Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna JVP) in Parliament November 30 threatening a return to armed struggle should ISGA be granted, and ongoing harsh characterizations of the LTTE in government-owned media. Perera surmised that the GSL has finally realized that peace negotiations are partly a propaganda war, and that mention of talking with Norway was included in the statement to mollify critics who see the GSL's reluctance to return to the peace table as political situation in the south--not peace talks with the

Tigers.

Army Committed to Ceasefire, Trinco Calmer

15. (C) Meanwhile, the CFA is holding, despite Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) Chief Trond Furuhoide's recent comments to the media that it is under pressure. The Sri Lanka Army (SLA), for its part, continues to resist LTTE provocation. In a December 1 meeting, SLA Director of Operations K. Silva told DAO, other defense attaches, and diplomats that the SLA will not break the CFA--regardless of the intensity and repetitiveness of LTTE provocation.

16. (C) After a week of tension, including a November 29 LTTE-called hartal, or general strike and the killing of two Sinhalese men (Ref A), the situation in Trincomalee is calmer. Deputy Inspector General of Police for the East Neville Wijesinghe told poloff that the December 1 funeral for one of the Sinhalese victims passed without incident. He discounted rumors about ongoing conflict between Tamil and Sinhalese communities. Wijesinghe speculated that it would take another one or two days for the situation to quiet down completely. Unlike in recent days, there was no curfew in Trincomalee December 2. The AID/OTI office, which closed early on December 1, has re-opened and is fully staffed.

17. (C) On December 2, the LTTE called another hartal in Vavuniya and Mannar, ostensibly to protest the security forces' disruption of Heroes' Day week celebrations in those areas (Ref B). According to SLA spokesman Daya Ratnayake, shops were closed and public transport halted, but only a small number of people protested. However, the entry (and exit) points from GSL-controlled to LTTE-controlled areas (i.e. Omanthai on the A9 near Vavuniya and Uyilankulum near Mannar) were closed, because International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) monitors could not travel to the border to patrol the no-man's land due to the hartal. The SLA's Ratnayake commented that thousands of people who cross the borders daily were unable to do so. Meanwhile, according to press reports, a soldier attached to SLA intelligence who was reportedly attacked by LTTE cadres in Jaffna on November 26 died in Colombo of his injuries.

Comment

18. (C) The GSL's reiteration of its long-standing position that resumed negotiations with the Tigers must be based on both interim and permanent solutions to the conflict is not surprising. Moreover, the GSL's renewed public commitment to the CFA is reassuring, especially in light of the JVP's recent provocative--if highly unlikely--statements threatening a return to armed insurgency if the GSL concedes to Tiger demands for the ISGA. Given the conflicting signals from the GSL and JVP, the Tigers are likely to use the GSL statement as reinforcement for their familiar argument that the south does not have the consensus or will to come back to talks.

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